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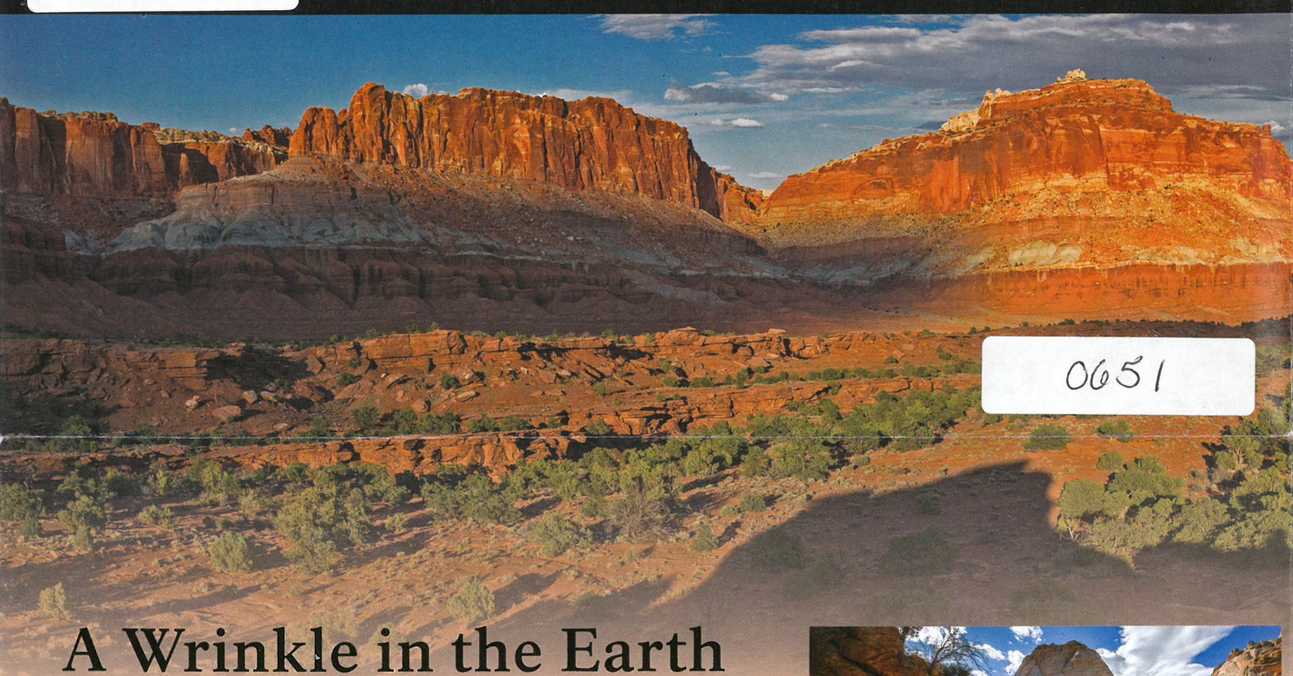
Capitol Reef

Capitol Reef National Park
Utah

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



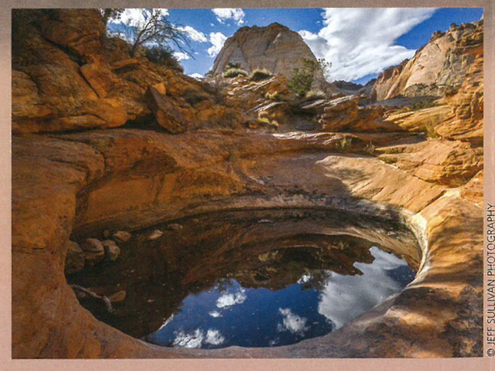
. . . the light seems to flow or shine out of the rock rather than to be reflected from it.

Clarence Dutton, geologist and early explorer of Capitol Reef, 1880s

Panorama Point at sunset
© JACOB W. FRANK

A Wrinkle in the Earth

A vibrant palette of color spills across the landscape before you. The hues are constantly changing, altered by the play of light against the towering cliffs, massive domes, arches, bridges, and twisting canyons. Over millions of years geologic forces shaped, lifted, and folded the earth, creating this rugged, remote area known as the Waterpocket Fold.



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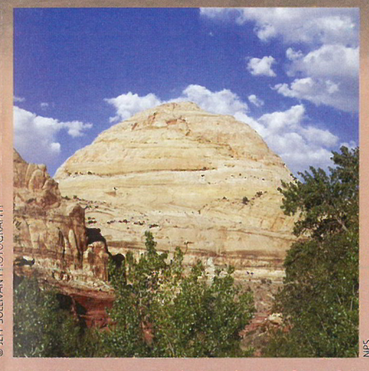
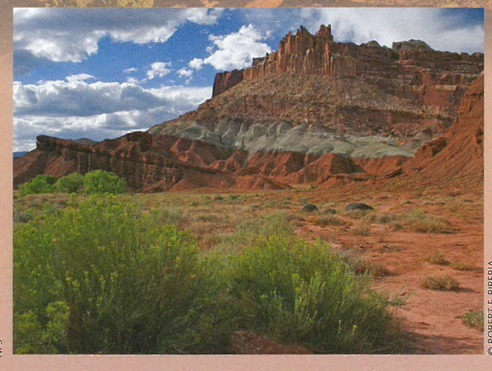
Erosion creates waterpockets and potholes that collect rainwater and snowmelt, enhancing a rich ecosystem.



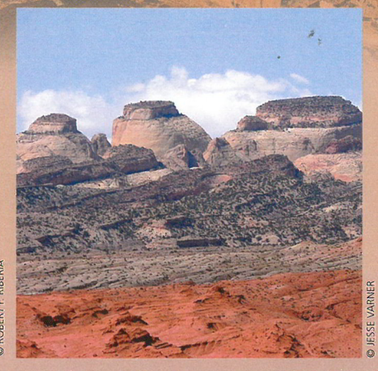
NPS

Capitol Dome reminded early travelers of the US Capitol building and later inspired the name of the park.



© ROBERT F. RIBERIA

The Castle is made of fractured Wingate Sandstone perched upon grey Chinle and red Moenkopi Formations.

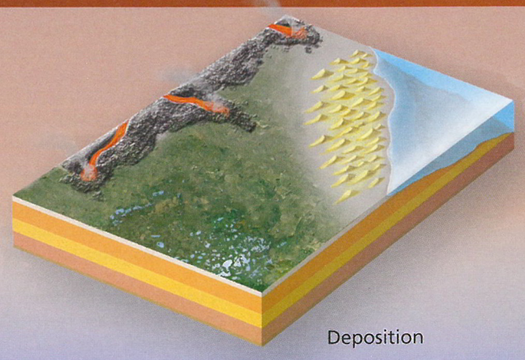


© JESSE VARNER

From the east, the Waterpocket Fold appears as a formidable barrier to travel, much like a barrier reef in an ocean.

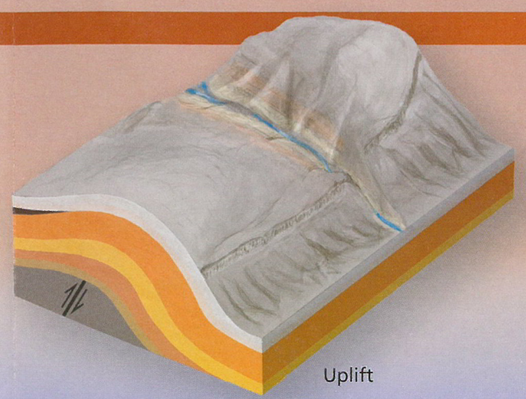
Creating the Waterpocket Fold

Capitol Reef's defining geologic feature is a wrinkle in Earth's crust, extending nearly 100 miles from Thousand Lake Mountain to Lake Powell. It was created over time by three gradual, yet powerful processes—deposition, uplift, and erosion. The result is a classic example of a monocline, or one-sided fold, in the otherwise horizontal rock layers.



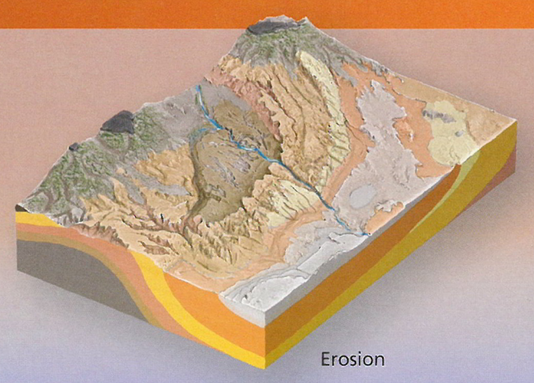
Deposition

Deposition The climate and geography changed dramatically over the past 280 million years. The environment was once oceans, deserts, swamps, and riverbeds, creating nearly 10,000 feet of sedimentary rock made of limestone, sandstone, and shale.



Uplift

Uplift Between 50 and 70 million years ago, an ancient fault was reactivated during a time of tectonic activity, lifting the layers to the west of the fault over 7,000 feet higher than those to the east. Rather than cracking, the rock layers folded over the fault line. Continued uplift occurred again some 20 million years ago.



Erosion

Erosion Erosive forces sculpted uplifted rock layers. Much of the carving occurred between one and six million years ago. Water, along with the pull of gravity, is the primary erosive force here. Powerful rains, flash flooding, and freeze-thaw cycles loosen, crack, and wash away stone, creating canyons, cliffs, domes, and bridges.

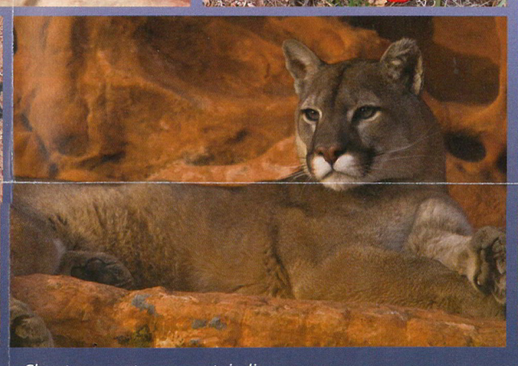
A Patchwork of Life

Look closely. This landscape can be deceiving. It may appear barren and lifeless, but it is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal species. Variations in topography, geology, elevation, and precipitation combine to create seven zones teeming with life. This high desert is a patchwork of pinyon-juniper forest; ponderosa and mixed conifer forest; grasslands; riparian habitats; mixed-shrub; and badlands—home to over 100 species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish; 239 species of birds; over 900 species of plants; and 33 ecological systems.

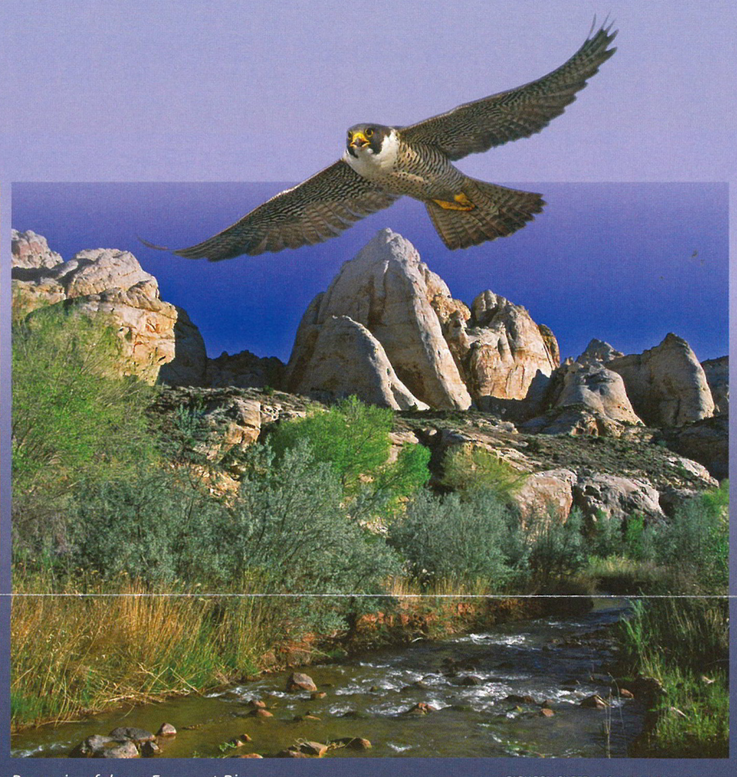
Living here has its challenges. Plants and animals have adapted, physically and behaviorally, to survive in this land of excessive heat, seasonal flash floods, winter snow, and variable, low precipitation. Climate change is resulting in increasing temperatures, more erratic precipitation, and intense solar radiation. How will they cope and adapt?

Bighorn sheep; marmot; Utah juniper

Northern plateau lizard; globe mallow



Claret cup cactus; mountain lion



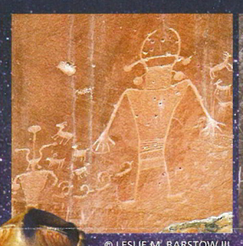
Peregrine falcon; Fremont River

BIGHORN SHEEP–© CHARLES R. SMITH; MARMOT–© LESLIE M. BARSTOW III; NORTHERN PLATEAU LIZARD–© ROBERT F. RIBERIA; MOUNTAIN LION–© MIKE DONAHUE; PEREGRINE–© THY BUN; FREMONT RIVER–© QT LUONG; OTHERS / NPS

Living on the Reef

American Indians

Carvings (petroglyphs) and paintings (pictographs) on rock walls are reminders of the people who lived here from about 300 to 1300 Common Era (CE) and even earlier. They were ancestors of the modern-day Hopi, Zuni, and Paiute tribes. The stories told on these rock walls depict maps, journeys, clan symbols, deities, animals, and calendars. People farmed the fertile land adjacent to the Fremont River and other nearby creeks. They supplemented crops by hunting wildlife and harvesting nuts, berries, and seeds. After 1300 CE no evidence of this culture is found.



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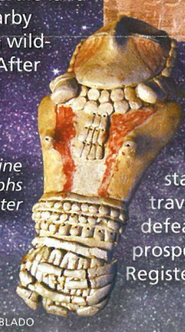

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Right: *Pre-historic clay figurine*
Above left: *Petroglyphs*
Above right: *Pioneer Register*

Travelers of the Past

The Waterpocket Fold territory was the last to be charted in the contiguous 48 states. Throughout the 1800s numerous travelers ventured into this land. Some were defeated by the imposing conditions. Others prospered. Many left their mark on the Pioneer Register as they passed through Capitol Gorge.

Pioneers

In the 1880s, Mormons established the small settlement of Fruita at the confluence of the Fremont River and Sulphur Creek. They built irrigation systems to water orchards and pastures, and sustain a self-reliant agricultural lifestyle for decades. Families tended the apple, peach, pear, and apricot trees. The park maintains the orchards, schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, and the Gifford Homestead as reminders of pioneer times.

One of Fruita's historic orchards
© LESLIE M. BARSTOW III

Preserving the Past

Capitol Reef National Monument was established in 1937 and became a national park in 1971. Today, millions of visitors from around the world marvel at the majesty of the Colorado Plateau, the Waterpocket Fold, and the rich natural and cultural features preserved for future generations.

Jewels of the Night

Welcome to dark sky country where open skies and the desert landscape provide the perfect theater for stars to shine, twinkle, and amaze. Take a seat as daylight dims and the stars take center stage.

Truely dark skies are becoming rare. This natural lightscape is a critical nocturnal habitat. Many species of animals rely on natural patterns of day and night for navigation, to cue behaviors, and hide from predators. Ask a ranger what you can do to help protect the night sky.

Above: *The Milky Way above Cathedral Valley.*
© WALLY PACHOLKA / ASTROPICS

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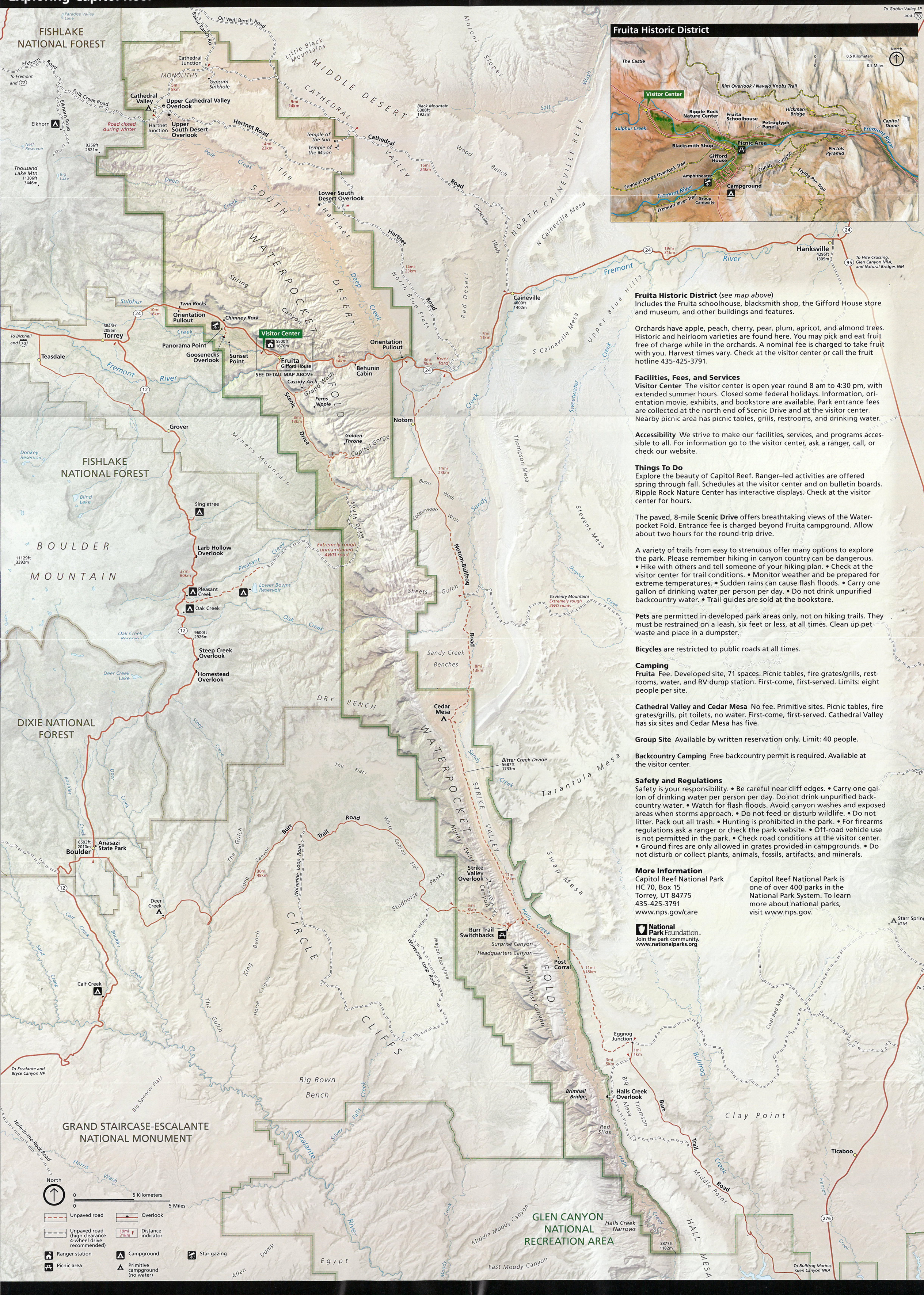
Exploring Capitol Reef



Fruita Historic District

Fruita Historic District (*see map above*)
Includes the Fruita schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, the Gifford House store and museum, and other buildings and features.

Orchards have apple, peach, cherry, pear, plum, apricot, and almond trees. Historic and heirloom varieties are found here. You may pick and eat fruit free of charge while in the orchards. A nominal fee is charged to take fruit with you. Harvest times vary. Check at the visitor center or call the fruit hotline 435-425-3791.

Facilities, Fees, and Services
Visitor Center The visitor center is open year round 8 am to 4:30 pm, with extended summer hours. Closed some federal holidays. Information, orientation movie, exhibits, and bookstore are available. Park entrance fees are collected at the north end of Scenic Drive and at the visitor center. Nearby picnic area has picnic tables, grills, restrooms, and drinking water.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Things To Do
Explore the beauty of Capitol Reef. Ranger–led activities are offered spring through fall. Schedules at the visitor center and on bulletin boards. Ripple Rock Nature Center has interactive displays. Check at the visitor center for hours.

The paved, 8-mile **Scenic Drive** offers breathtaking views of the Waterpocket Fold. Entrance fee is charged beyond Fruita campground. Allow about two hours for the round-trip drive.

A variety of trails from easy to strenuous offer many options to explore the park. Please remember hiking in canyon country can be dangerous. • Hike with others and tell someone of your hiking plan. • Check at the visitor center for trail conditions. • Monitor weather and be prepared for extreme temperatures. • Sudden rains can cause flash floods. • Carry one gallon of drinking water per person per day. • Do not drink unpurified backcountry water. • Trail guides are sold at the bookstore.

Pets are permitted in developed park areas only, not on hiking trails. They must be restrained on a leash, six feet or less, at all times. Clean up pet waste and place in a dumpster.

Bicycles are restricted to public roads at all times.

Camping
Fruita Fee. Developed site, 71 spaces. Picnic tables, fire grates/grills, restrooms, water, and RV dump station. First-come, first-served. Limits: eight people per site.

Cathedral Valley and Cedar Mesa No fee. Primitive sites. Picnic tables, fire grates/grills, pit toilets, no water. First-come, first-served. Cathedral Valley has six sites and Cedar Mesa has five.

Group Site Available by written reservation only. Limit: 40 people.

Backcountry Camping Free backcountry permit is required. Available at the visitor center.

Safety and Regulations
Safety is your responsibility. • Be careful near cliff edges. • Carry one gallon of drinking water per person per day. Do not drink unpurified backcountry water. • Watch for flash floods. Avoid canyon washes and exposed areas when storms approach. • Do not feed or disturb wildlife. • Do not litter. Pack out all trash. • Hunting is prohibited in the park. • For firearms regulations ask a ranger or check the park website. • Off-road vehicle use is not permitted in the park. • Check road conditions at the visitor center. • Ground fires are only allowed in grates provided in campgrounds. • Do not disturb or collect plants, animals, fossils, artifacts, and minerals.

More Information
Capitol Reef National Park
HC 70, Box 15
Torrey, UT 84775
435-425-3791
www.nps.gov/care

Capitol Reef National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
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